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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: SECRETARY CLINTON'S SPEECH EVOKES DEBATE ON  
VIRTUAL WAY FORWARD

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11. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

12. (SBU) SUMMARY: Following a viewing of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's speech on Internet Freedom, a roundtable discussion by Kazakhstani Internet activists on January 22 in Almaty revealed broad agreement that Kazakhstani authorities seriously limit freedom of speech on the Internet. However, two opposing views emerged regarding approaches to improve internet freedom in Kazakhstan. Younger activists wanted to organize protest actions to abolish Kazakhstan's restrictive Internet law. A more mature group highlighted the ineffectiveness of earlier protests and the counter-productiveness of repeating such efforts now. END SUMMARY.

13. (U) On January 22, the Public Affairs Section in Almaty hosted a viewing of Secretary Clinton's speech on Internet Freedom, with Russian translation, followed by a one-hour round table discussion on Internet issues in Kazakhstan. Twenty-five members of local NGOs and Internet media leaders took part in a freewheeling discussion following the speech.

14. (SBU) During the roundtable, members of the "For Free Internet" movement -- Galym Ageleuov, Murat Tungishbayev, Ulan Shemshet, and Almaz Kusherbayev -- who represent the younger generation -- argued that activists should seek to abolish Kazakhstan's Internet law by organizing protests. (NOTE: The Internet law, signed by President Nazarbayev in July 2009, reclassifies all websites as "media outlets," making them subject to Kazakhstan's media legislation. Civil society leaders and the international community raised frequent concerns that the law could be used to censor the Internet (reftel). END NOTE.) The young activists highlighted the example of "national patriots" who held a hunger strike that impeded adoption of the national unity doctrine. Some proposed the organization of "flash mob" actions, arguing their relative effectiveness in the past compared to efforts by moderates, like the veteran media-watchdog NGO "Adil Soz," to negotiate with the government.

15. (SBU) Tamara Kaleyeva, President of "Adil Soz" (Foundation for

Protection of Freedom of Speech), argued for a more moderate approach. She said that protests had not prevented the Internet law's adoption, and that they now could not change anything. Kaleyeva highlighted that only 14% of Kazakhstanis have Internet access. "It is necessary to increase the number of users in order to increase attention to this issue," she declared. She added that the assertion that 2009 riots in Moldova were organized through the Internet was a principal arguments used to support adoption of the Internet law. Kaleyeva's organization and Yuriy Mizinov, Editor-in-Chief of zonakz.net, are drafting a code of ethics for bloggers and a draft agreement between Internet media outlets and bloggers, which they plan to distribute for discussion. The agreement seeks to increase bloggers' awareness of the law and prevent comments that might cause interethnic discord or be perceived as unconstitutional. (NOTE: Kazakhstan's legislation imposes heavy penalties for public comments that could incite ethnic hatred. END NOTE.) Kaleyeva strongly contended that this would be the best way to ensure the survival of Internet media within the framework of the current law. She cautioned, however, that agreements with bloggers should not compel self-censorship, but rather should encourage writers to take responsibility for their products. Several of the more radical activists disagreed with Kaleyeva, arguing the blogger agreement is a type of self-censorship.

16. (SBU) Yevgeniya Plakhina, a reporter for opposition newspaper "Respublika," noted that the official reason for adopting the Internet law was a struggle against pornography and with publications aiming to foment interethnic discord. However, pornography still exists, these sites are accessible without problem, and pornographic sites have not been sanctioned. Plakhina warned that the internet law mainly was targeted against civil society. "This law is like a red button that will be pressed when

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necessary, e.g., before parliamentary elections."

17. (SBU) Zhanar Kasymbekova of the Ar.Rukh.Khak Foundation emphasized that the problem of Internet access exists not only in rural areas, but even in Almaty. A recent survey by an NGO on Internet availability in student dormitories found that, although communication lines are in place, most dormitories do not have Internet access. Kasymbekova suggested de-monopolization of Internet providers and continued efforts to change the current Internet law. Another participant, Adil Dzhalilov, Director of MediaNet Program Development, highlighted Kazakhstan's vast territory and low population. He said that communication companies should receive benefits and encouragement to build lines in rural areas. He also noted the woeful un-development of the Kazakh-language Internet.

18. (SBU) COMMENT: Secretary Clinton's address was a valuable catalyst for a lively discussion about the repercussions of Parliament's adoption of the Internet law. Her speech, and the roundtable that followed, prompted the free exchange of ideas regarding what Internet freedom really means for Kazakhstan, but left many questions about what activists can do to improve it. END COMMENT.

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